

Sketch

Volume 74, Number 1

2009

Article 14

On Display

Logan McDonald*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©2009 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

Logan McDonald

Through the grate I can see her. She doesn't dare move. She holds her head high as middle-aged women moves around her, barely giving her a glance. How can they not see her for her beauty? Her arching eyebrows look as if they were painted on by an artist. Her mouth is a perfect shade of pink and it doesn't move, stoically. Her skin is a perfect milky shade of white from head to toe that makes the lines of her joints barely noticeable. The skin has a shimmer that glows in the bright lighting. Her bright baldness isn't off putting. It just separates her that much more from the rest. She stands there, unmoved, as these old hens peck at shirts and pants, all lying in neat piles around her.

43

I would bet they never let their grandsons stay up late and watch the news or have friends over for sleepovers. And they pinch your ear for saying the wrong thing in church, and don't let you have dessert when you didn't eat all of your peas but you only had one pea left and it fell on the floor and you can even see it has a cat hair on it, but no, you can't have a piece of pie. And they grab and prod at these neat stacks of clothes, holding them up in the air as if to see what would have looked good on them twenty years ago and then put them back in a crumpled, folded pile.

But she doesn't care. She's wearing a beautiful dress above them all and its more revealing than anything these old hags could get away with. And her breasts are perfect and small, coming to small points beneath the loose fabric. But I don't look at them for long, out of respect. I look down at my arms instead. They're specked in lines of dust and sweat that cling to the arm hair. There's a screw digging into my left arm but I don't mind. It is my penance to her. Even the small pool of blood that is a sticky mess of hair and dust and dead flies is fine with me.

Ah, the fly! It has stopped buzzing and landed on my arm. It doesn't move. I think it sees her. The fly is also entranced by her poise and grace on stage, in front of this unworthy audience of naysayers and ne'er-do-wells. We can both see our reflections in the shine of light from her hairless head. She knows that we watch her and she smiles.

Her smile makes it easier to bear up here. It's so hot and the dusty air is hard to breathe. As long as I don't think about them, the scratches are barely noticeable. I hope she can't see them. That would be very embarrassing. But I'm sure she can't, with the bright lights down there and it being so dark in here. I just wish I could see the back of her dress, see how it drapes over the soft curve of her back. I think I can make it there, but I can't turn around. It's too tight of a space. And my legs have fallen asleep. Dammit. All this jumbling around is making too much noise. I can see my nana looking up at me through the grate with concerned eyes. Dust is falling onto the bright-colored piles of shirts below me. Dammit. I have to start moving. And the fly has started its buzzing and the game begins all over again. I can see light coming through a grate ahead and a bend comes right after it.

I can see the back of her dress! It's gorgeous and low-cut, falling to the small of her back. Her shoulder blades are perfectly aligned and peek from the edges of fabric. It really accentuates her neck and looks like the kind of dress a model would wear. I bet she could be a model. Not like these frumpy old ladies that sit around the house doing crossword puzzles

and pick at the edges of the table cloth until they're all tattered. And definitely not that man--that mall security guard being led into the store by the beady-eyed crow that looks like my nana. But it can't be my nana. I was at her funeral.

It was so quiet at the funeral and the organ music playing in the background. All the bridge ladies wore matching pink hats. They looked ridiculous all in a line together. But everyone turned around, even the priest, and looked at me. I shouldn't have laughed. Nana shouldn't have laughed at me. They shouldn't have poked and prodded at me like they pick apart these neatly stacked pants. Buy one, get one half off, that sign says. She stands on display next to the sign, her hands stiff in jointed angles as the soulless old women shuffle to the soulless muzak.

And that nana keeps squawking and pointing at the ceiling, where I was just minutes ago. That guard is dumb and fat and would never fit into a size two, like the beauty he stands in front of. He could never be good enough to stand on display, in front of the thousands of people that buzz by each day. He could never hold that same pose, never moving an inch. Even as he's yelling up at the ceiling tiles, I know that he could never stand there with milky skin and soft pink lips, and face the crowd of grabbing hands that prod and poke at you, staring.

Logan McDonald writes both non-fiction and fiction, although he prefers fiction. Look for his first novel in a bookstore near you in the Spring of 2018.